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Red Card: The European Refugee Crisis

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Red Card: The European Refugee Crisis

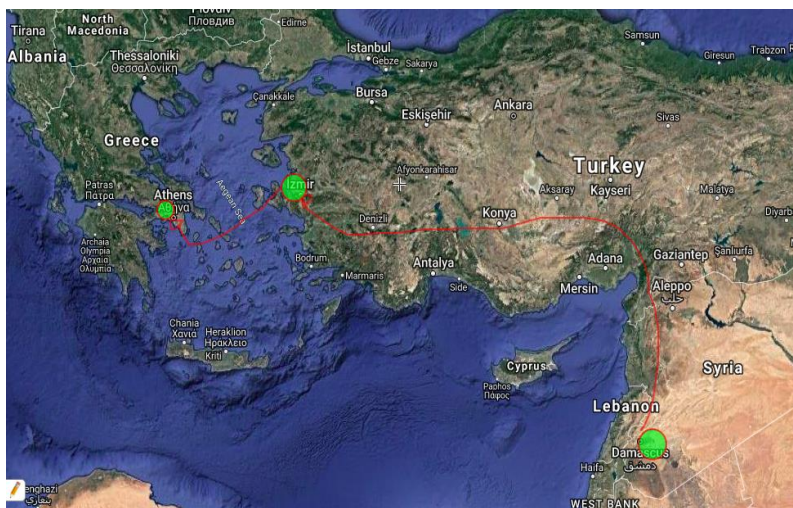
By: Isabel Chiriboga



2015: Jacob and his son Isiah

I am a Syrian refugee. I never intended to leave Syria; my country, my people, my culture are all part of who I am and now all I feel is disappointment and emptiness.

I will start from the beginning. I was born in 1981, and since then my parents have always taught me to excel in my academics, I ended up graduating as a lawyer and systems engineer back in Syria¹. I married a beautiful woman and had 2 beautiful sons. It's drastic how life can change in a matter of seconds. I became a civil servant for Bashar al-Assad's government but in 2010 the Arab Spring brought pro-democracy protests to Syria and soon I decided to join the underground opposition. I became one of the leaders because I wanted to fight for the future of my children, turns out it was the worst thing I could have done. They went after me. They killed my wife and my youngest son while I was at work and my older son at school².



This destroyed me. I knew that we couldn't stay in Syria; I had my son to think about. In the beginning of September 2015 his school was bombed³; what kind of future could I give my only child if we stayed. I took all of my savings and decided to flee Syria. I had a few friends that left before and settled in Germany so this was our

¹ According to Koroutchev (2016) Syrian refugees are mostly highly educated and have earned high level education degrees. However the unemployment rate is 8.12% which is affecting thousands of people. The conditions in many Syrian cities such as Damascus are simply too dangerous for a stable work environment.

² According to History (2018) the civil war that began in Syria in the aftermath of the Arab Spring lasted for several years, forcing many to leave the country to seek refuge in Turkey, Greece and throughout Western Europe. For a time, the militant group ISIS had declared a caliphate (a nation governed by Islamic law) in northeastern Syria. The group executed thousands of people, and many others fled the region in fear of their lives.

³ The UN children's agency UNICEF has confirmed that 22 children were killed in airstrikes on a school complex in Syria's rebel-held Idlib province on September of 2015. Earlier reports had put the death toll at 12. At least six teachers were also killed in the attack.

destination. I knew it was going to be hard but no one can ever prepare you for the conditions you'll live during this journey, they are unimaginable, unreal to people that have not lived them.

We crossed the border and traveled to Izmir, Turkey; luckily I had a few acquaintances that helped us get settled for a few days. We needed to find the smuggler that we were looking for. This particular smuggler was supposed to be one of the safest and therefore most expensive ones since we had to cross the Mediterranean and get to Lesbos, Greece⁴. A few days later we found the smuggler and paid him around 3000 euros for my son and I⁵. We were leaving at 2 am the following morning to avoid the coast guards. When we got to the port I was extremely surprised to witness a raft...literally, a raft that could fit a maximum of 15 people and we were waiting in a line of 40⁶. I was waiting for another one to arrive, but it never did. It was the most frightening night I have experienced in my entire life. It was raining and the bottom of the raft began to fill with water, women and children were all screaming, a few of the people that were traveling with us began to stand up out of desperation despite the smuggler's constant warnings to stay seated to prevent the raft from flipping. My son and I remained silent sitting in the middle of the freezing raft; I took off most of my clothes and cuddled Isiah. Of the 40 of us who boarded the raft in Izmir, 28 got to Athens⁷. That night still haunts me.

⁴ According to Lendaro (2016) In the beginning in September 2015, several thousand migrants from the Middle East, having transited through Turkey, landed in only a few days on the island of Lesbos (Greece). Tensions were high between the police and the migrants, who asked to be transferred to the European continent to continue their journey. They were thus asking that the restrictions included in the Dublin Regulation not be applied, and that they be allowed to seek asylum in the country that was the destination of their journey (for many of them, Sweden and Germany).

⁵ According to Nehal et al. (2017) the cost of the journey depends on the distance, the route, and having another smuggler to receive migrants in transit and destination countries. The characteristics of passengers are also taken into consideration. Almost all migrants escaping war zones in the Middle East, especially in Iraq and Syria, pass through Turkey on their way to Europe and seek the services of smugglers. According to the United Nations, prices reached \$US9,000 (8000 euro) for a family of four traveling from Iraq to Greece.

⁶ According to Lendaro (2016) people who die at sea trying to cross the Mediterranean on overcrowded boats do not have any actual fundamental rights regardless of the circumstances. The effectiveness of these rights, in fact, depends on the nationality of the person and the State within which those rights are claimed. In particular, the right to leave one's country is enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, stating that '1) Everyone has the right to freedom of movement and residence within the borders of each state; and 2) Everyone has the right to leave any country, including his own, and to return to his country.' While this right is guaranteed, putting it into practice, that is to say, the right to immigrate to a country other than one's own, conflicts with the power of the State of the immigrant's destination to choose the people it wants to allow in.

⁷ According to Bathke (2019) Among the maritime borders that are the most dangerous, the most controlled, and despite this, the most crossed, the Mediterranean Sea has also become one of the most deadly over the last fifteen years: over 29,000 people have lost their lives there in the hope of reaching Europe, primarily by drowning but also from hypothermia and dehydration

In Lesbos, the smuggler requested all of our documents and, his last words were “You’ll get them back soon”. That was the last time I saw him. Soon a Greek coast guard stopped us and told us we had to settle in a refugee camp. To get there we walked for two days⁸. We were given a tent covered in mud. I had to use my only clothes to mop up the dirt. My son cried because it was so cold, soon he developed a serious fever, but there was no ambulance and I had no money to transport him to the hospital. Eventually, we made it, my child and I live in a refugee camp in Moira. I am a lawyer and an engineer, but I am not allowed to work here. I don’t want to live like this, being subjected to forced labor, but we have no choice. We are at the mercy of government policies and must wait 3 months for our next interview to claim asylum. I feel so much shame, that I can’t give my son the life he deserves. I am humiliated. We are stuck; a number in a system.

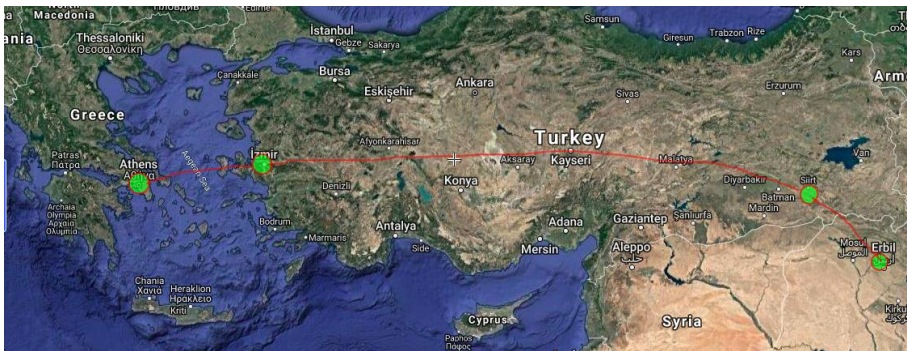
Even if I get residency in Greece, I have no passport, no documents so I can’t visit my sister in Turkey or mother who is still trapped in Syria. I can’t work here and I am not asking for money, housing or clothes. All I want is to secure a dignified life for my son and me. I want to sweat and work for our future. We are strong; we have survived pain only Syrians can understand. But, I need a new kind of strength: hope. I miss my family. I haven’t seen them in three years. My brother is still imprisoned by the regime I pray he is alive⁹. As of this moment, I do not know what will happen and the worse thing is that it is not up to me and that I cannot do anything about it, just sit in our tent and wait.

⁸ According to Smith (2019) more than 13,000 people are now crammed into tents and shipping containers with facilities for just 3,000 at Moria (Greece), Moria, Europe’s most infamous refugee camp, is just a few miles away from Skala Sikamineas. Built on a hill among olive groves, it’s surrounded by large cemented walls with barbed wire on top. Most of those who land in Lesbos eventually end up here, one of five reception and identification centers in the Aegean Sea.

⁹ According to Barnard (2019) Kidnappings and killings by the Islamic State captured more attention in the West, but the Syrian prison system has vacuumed up many more times the number of people detained by ISIS in Syria. Government detention accounts for around 90 percent of the disappearances tallied by the Syrian Network.

2019: The Ali Family

We are a small family from Iraq a region known as Erbil, which is located in Iraqi Kurdistan (North of Iraq). We decided to leave Erbil because of the constant and unbearable conflicts and violence between the Kurds with the rest of Iraq, Turkey, and Syria¹⁰. It is simply not a safe place to live in; people die every day in this area. We decided to migrate to Europe through Turkey since this is the route a lot of people normally take to flee this violence. Yet crossing the border to Turkey through Mardin is dangerous because border patrols normally dump refugees in inhumane detention centers¹¹. Thus, we decided to take an alternative route (through Qamishli) to avoid the border partols. To cross the border illegally we had to climb a mountain for about 8 hours while it was raining and freezing cold.



I was pregnant and our baby was only 2 years old. At 5 am the next morning we arrived in Turkey but the Turkish army found us and arrested us. Yes, they

arrested my baby too. We were sent to a refugee camp, a large room better describes it¹². It was a dangerous place and to our surprise, we saw more refugees from Iraq that were arrested as well. All families slept in the same room and had the same toilet. At least 50 refugees were in this room and shared a single toilet. I would hear the crying and desperation of women and children

¹⁰ According to the Crisis Group (2016) The federal government in Baghdad and the Kurdish government in Erbil long have been at loggerheads over a range of issues that, at their core, concern the nature of Iraq's federal system and the Kurdish region's future. They disagree especially over the extent of the region's powers, including the authority to sign oil contracts; the status of territories claimed by the Kurds as part of Kurdistan; and payment for the Kurds' regional guard force as well as federal budget allocations more generally.

¹¹ Laessing (2019) refugees there have been housed by authorities in the Bardarash refugee camp, originally set up in 2013 initially for Iraqis fleeing Islamic State.

¹² Turkish authorities (Ipa, 2019) have stated that they can no longer afford the high costs of the camps and that refugees, living isolated in the camps, face difficulties integrating into Turkish social life. Ankara has been systematically closing down the refugee camps since late 2018. So far the government has officially closed six refugee camps in Adiyaman, Gaziantep and Kilis provinces, compelling their inhabitants to leave the area or cramming incoming refugees in just a few detention centers. Since the government is not providing enough resources for this issue, refugees are living in these centers under terrible conditions.

while waiting to use the toilet. We were treated like animals. We couldn't buy food because it was too expensive, and although the Turkish army did give people food it wasn't nearly enough. After 16 days of extreme torture were more than one guard sexually abused me¹³ we were able to pay a large amount of money (almost all we had left) to get out of this place, mainly because I was pregnant and I couldn't keep living in such conditions.

As soon as we left, I was admitted to the hospital and lost my baby. After a few days, we left and finally got to Izmir where we took a boat to cross the Aegean and get to Greece¹⁴. I will never forget the three hours we spend on that boat. I thought we were going to die because the boat driver had told us that there was a technical problem with the boat and that it was very possible that we wouldn't make it to Greece. Eventually, the bottom of the boat began to fill with water and everyone was terrified. The boat was overcrowded but I refused to wear a life jacket because my baby couldn't wear one and I refused to watch my baby drown while I stayed afloat¹⁴. After 3 hours the Greek navy came to help us, one of the soldiers asked for my baby, they rescued us. We got to Athens, and we are currently living in the Alexandria Camp¹⁵.

It is very hard but at least I'm alive that's what I keep thinking. It is difficult to live in a tent when you used to have a house, but we must accept it because we are refugees, we are not lawyers or professors anymore, we've lived here for 5 months and there is no way out. I ask myself why? What did we do to deserve this? And an officer once told me, that we decided to be in this situation and I told him we didn't decide. The war decided for us.

¹³ According to Linus (2011) detention centers are not safe for women; specially those that are not correctly supervised by the government. Women are constantly sexually abused.

¹⁴ According to Autorbusteam (2016) For many refugees, the living conditions are not the main concern, as we have already seen in other camps. Alexandria camp is another camp that introduced the pre-registration procedure after the eviction of Idomeni. Authorities stated that the purpose of the procedure is to give refugees the chance to apply for asylum and be reunited with family members. They also mention that available options are dependent on the individual case and on the laws of Greece and the EU.

¹⁵ AutorBusteam. 2016. "Alexandria Camp: Waiting in Limbo." *Moving Europe*. Retrieved November 23, 2019 (<http://moving-europe.org/alexandria-camp-waiting-in-limbo/>).

2018: Karan

My name is Karan and I'm 22 years old. I have lived my entire life in Somalia; I had a decent childhood but I grew up with constant violence and war in my city Mogadishu. I was forced to leave because Al-Shabaab (a terrorist group associated with Al-Qaeda) gained control of the entire city¹⁶. This terrorist group imprisoned me for 15 days and this is the main reason why I decided to leave. I feared for my life. I soon decided I wanted to pursue my education in Europe and thus made arrangements to migrate to Germany. I traveled through the Saharan desert for about 3 months. This journey is one that will be ingrained in my mind and my body for the rest of my life; the food was very scarce and I was sexually abused multiple times¹⁷. What I learned is that if you do not have acquaintances throughout the trip you are not going to get to your destination; because nobody is willing to help you. These people were not afraid of anything; they will abuse, imprison and torture you. You become their slave and lose all human agency and dignity.



After three months in the Saharan desert we arrived in Libya, I was wrecked. They situated us in a camp controlled by men. Women and men were in separate rooms but guards used to come to our rooms every night, raped us and

¹⁶ According to Roth (2019) Fighting, insecurity and lack of state protection, and recurring humanitarian crises had a devastating impact on Somali civilians in 2018. The number of internally displaced people, many living unassisted and at risk of serious abuse, reached an estimated 2.7 million. The Islamist armed group Al-Shabab subjected people living under its control to harsh treatment, forced recruitment, and carried out deadly attacks targeting civilians.

¹⁷ According to Global Citizen an estimated 30,000 people have gone missing in the desert, according to the AP. They are believed to have perished in the blistering heat and powerful dust storms, which shrivel and bury dead bodies, everything can happen in the desert; constant robberies and abuse happen on a daily basis, according to the International Organization for Migration, who worked with the AP on this report. That's nearly twice as many migrants and refugees who have died trying to cross the Mediterranean Sea during the same period, making this the deadliest migratory route in the world.

beat us as they pleased¹³. During my time in this camp I attempted suicide but one of the few friends I made in that horrible place saved me. While I was in the nursing room recovering something happened. A fight broke out between a human smuggler and a young man, this fight cause huge commotion and everyone in the camp started uprising against the guards it was when this happened that my friend grabbed me and we were able to escape the refugee camp; we were lucky to survive since as we continue to escape so did many people but a lot of them were shot by multiple guards.

Eventually, we made it to Malta through a smuggler boat; it was another terrifying experience and my friend barely made it to Malta because water started getting into the boat and she was hypothermic when we arrived⁷. Yet we made it we survived, many of us did not. Once we got to Malta, we were sent to a refugee camp; but at least in this one, we lived in a container and we had decent food. We've been here for 5 months and we haven't been called for our asylum interviews¹⁸.

¹⁸ According to Bendixsen (2018) with the Dublin regulations, the EU sought to avoid having a migrant move from one country to another to apply for asylum.¹⁶ Such efforts to reduce secondary movements inside the Schengen area have later come to include inducements to ensure that applicants are registered properly, and that Member States have reception conditions in line with EU law and fundamental rights. However, the ongoing migration movement signals the failure of the system to produce equal standards for asylum procedures, accommodation, approval of asylum claims, and for the general treatment of migrants by police and the authorities. The goals of the Dublin regulations have failed because there is still substantial divergence in reception practices, procedures and qualification requirements.

2018: Farrell

Things were hard in South Sudan; I depended on my mother who remained in Saudi Arabia for financial support, felt completely alone with no friends and family. I had to leave Saudi Arabia to work in the oil fields of South Sudan and help support the family financially¹⁹. When I heard about Libya I didn't think it could get any tougher than South Sudan. I was 17, all I knew was that I hated the place where I was and that I wanted to finish my education and leave all of the conflicting areas I had lived during my entire life.

I soon got in touch with smugglers in Omdurman a marketplace that is known not only for camels and commodities but also for human smugglers that facilitate the travel for refugees and migrants to Europe²⁰. I traveled to Sudan with a group of 120 people from Saudi Arabia and most of us were open to the opportunity of leaving South Sudan and migrating to Europe. Eventually, we got ourselves a smuggler. The journey across the Sahara to the northern city of



Ajdabiya in Libya was riddled with all sorts of difficulties, traffickers were inhumane they would beat men and women to death at the slightest provocation²¹.

We traveled in a small pick up overcrowded pick-up truck and the

¹⁹ According to Albrithen Saudi Arabia has an economy made up of about 16 million Saudis, with most of the rest of the population consisting of foreign workers. The poverty rate among Saudis continues to rise as youth unemployment skyrockets. More than two-thirds of Saudis are younger than 30, and nearly three-quarters of all unemployed Saudis are in their 20s, according to government statistics.

²⁰ According to Dijken (2018). Many smugglers, traders and intermediaries have their base in the souqs (markets) of Khartoum and Omdurman, the trading hub on the opposite bank of the Nile.

²¹ According to Papataxiarchis Money is all around: it has a powerful symbolic presence in relation to the huge profits of the traffickers or professionals who take advantage of the refugees, the large monetary donations managed by the NGOs, or the salaries of the professional humanitarian-ians.

smuggler will use this tent-like fabric to cover us leaving us against near suffocation²². I suffer from severe asthma and in this situation; I can say that I was on the verge of death. One night we stopped at a big house where we were supposed to sleep before we continued the journey, but during this instance, police broke into the house and started arresting everyone. I was extremely scared because a gun was being pointed at me; they let us go after we proved to be innocent yet shortly after two of our smugglers alerted the police of our intention of migrating to Europe and thus we couldn't escape and we were thrown in prison²³. There was nothing we could do. I was in prison for 5 years; at the age of 23, I can say that I have probably experienced things that most people will never experience in their entire life. Eventually I returned to Saudi Arabia and now I am living here with my mother in conditions that are unbearable, we do not have any money.

²² According to Sengupta (2015) The journey across the Sahara is fraught with risks – of robberies, rapes, kidnappings and killings. On reaching Libya, the travelers risk being arrested by the government based in Tripoli, one of two that are fighting for control of the country, and ending up in detentions centers. But tens of thousands make it through for the last lap of their journey.

²³ According to Tamara (2019) The Zintan Prison is one of the most deathly prisons in the world; with a rotting pile of garbage a meter high at one end of the room, with mounds of worms, which have already taken over the floor. People are dying alongside the worms, mostly of tuberculosis. The warden limits the entry of assistance groups and the inmates don't receive a regular supply of medications. Over the past six months alone 22 people have died of starvation and sickness. Their water supply isn't regular either because the warden controls it, on one occasion turning it off for four days in a row. Prisoners were so desperate for water, they resorted to drinking toilet water.

2019: Mohammed

Ever since this journey started I keep asking myself, is it worth it? I lived in Eritrea for several years before leaving to Khartoum in search of better opportunities. Despite not having formal authorization as a refugee to seek employment I succeeded in finding an illegal job of fixing cars²⁴. Life in Khartoum was difficult, I lived in constant fear of being discovered by the authorities and thus I decided to migrate to Europe. Although I had heard that the journey was quite hard, I had hope that once I got there I would be granted asylum and have the opportunity to work. I was naive; I didn't care about the risks. My mentality was if he made it, why can't I.



Through the assistance of human smugglers and money I had saved, I left Sudan in a crammed truck with dozens of others who were seeking a better future like myself. While we were crossing the Sahara desert, the smugglers turned on us, they began

beating people to death with no reason, they would cover us in plastic wraps like cargo to get through the border patrols, we almost died of suffocation⁷. After crossing the border and getting into Libya, I had to rely on a few other Eritreans because I had used all of my money in this part of the journey. This was a major problem because refugees who had the money paid the

²⁴ According to Ikemenjima (2018) The last two decades have witnessed a mass exodus of Eritreans migrating to neighboring countries, mainly Sudan and Ethiopia, as well as far-off countries in Europe. The possibilities that young people aspire to range from acquiring commodities such as money and other material possessions, to the desire for higher education or long-term personal relationships, such as being happily married. An aspiration is defined as “the perceived importance or necessity of goals”.

smugglers to be released to the Libyan coastal city of Tripoli to continue their journey to Europe. Yet, I was left behind because I couldn't afford it²⁵.

I stayed in Al Jadid, Libya for around a week and with the help of a few friends, I was able to get enough money to pay for my trip to Benghazi from where I was smuggled into Tripoli. Once in Tripoli, I boarded an old boat contrary to what my smuggler had promised along with 350 refugees and migrants. The ship was overcrowded we were supposed to take 7 hours to get to Sicily but we ended up taking 14²⁶. It was a frightening journey, filled with sick and exhausted refugees a few died on our way due to hypothermia and illness and they were dumped into the water to reduce the weight of the boat.

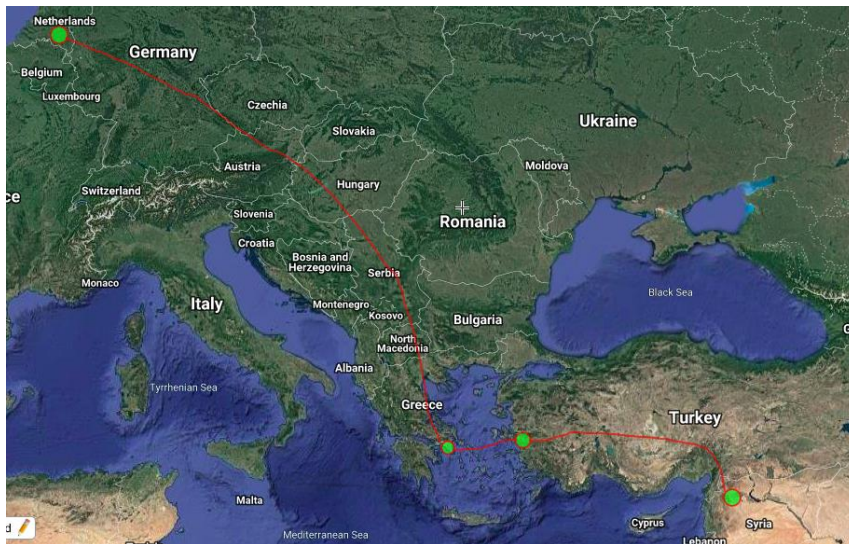
Families were traveling with kids and babies in inhumane conditions, most of them fleeing the wars of the Middle East and the terrible living conditions in very poor countries; we all had the simple goal of crossing to the other side in the hope of a better future.

²⁵ According to Kingsley (2015) Some people pay to reach the Libyan coast in one single transaction. Bayin Keflemekal, 30, a nurse from Eritrea, paid \$7,000 (£4,600) earlier this month to get there through Sudan within a week, on the back of a series of pick-up trucks. Others move in stages: Fatima Bahgar, a Malian student who was rescued from the sea last week by Libyan coastguards, says she spent a year in Algeria before travelling on to Libya.

²⁶ According to Kingsley (2015) more disasters are happening this year is partly a result of the lower price for a seat on a boat. "It's ridiculous," says Hajj. "Three hundred passengers is the maximum for a 17-metre boat. But people are sending out boats loaded with 350, 700, 800. They are being overloaded because the price of an individual has gone down." Syrians, he says, tend to have more savings so they are paying more to go on boats with a safer number of passengers. "The Syrians ask: 'What is a boat altogether?' I'll tell them. And they say: 'We'll give you this but don't add more people, and for that we'll pay 20% extra.' [Sub-Saharan] Africans don't ask for guarantees. They don't have the money."

2017: Fatima

I am 30 years old and I am from Aleppo, Syria. My family and I decided to leave Aleppo because of the constant violence and bombing. I used to have twins, one of my kids died when he was 6 months old due to a heart condition. The doctors told me this likely happened because of my constant fear and stress during pregnancy due to the war in which we were living. We used to live right in the downtown area of Aleppo, where most of the bombings happen²⁷, in days where it was too bad we would drive to the outskirts of the city and spend the day in the most random places; when we would leave we never knew if we were going to see our house and our stuff when we went back at the end of the day. We were not living we were surviving. When the bombs started, my oldest daughter would run to the bathroom because the roof in this area was stronger and thus safer. I lost my hand in one of the bombings²⁸. I was resting on the sofa by the window when the rocket fell and the window exploded causing the entire frame to fall over my hand. I was trapped underneath it without being able to move for about 2 hours without knowing if my children were alive.



Soon an ambulance arrived and they started helping people out of the ruins, I waited another hour and a half until a doctor came and helped me out, this was the last thing I remember because I passed out due to the pain. I was in surgery for 10 hours, the artery was

damaged and the nerves in my arm died and couldn't be fixed. I was not under general anesthesia

²⁷ According to Bendixsen (2017) The border to Serbia had already been closed. In February 2016, Turkey closed its border to an estimated 70,000 refugees fleeing Aleppo, although Turkey had previously allowed hundreds of thousands of Syrian refugees to enter and remained open "for emergency situations", according to Turkish officials.

²⁸ According to Roth (2018) Clinical symptoms affecting victims of the chemical weapons attack in Khan Sheikhoun suggested that an organophosphorus compound, which targets the nervous system, was used. The attack killed at least 92, including 30 children, and injured hundreds more.

but rather awake for the whole surgery with anesthesia only on my arm. After this event we couldn't keep living there I didn't want to lose anything else so my three kids and I left Syria and went to Turkey, where we stayed for a month and a half but it was hard we had to avoid the police constantly and we were under constant fear of being caught²⁹. Once we were able to contact a smuggler we waited from 5 am to 10 pm to get into the boat that was going to take us to Greece. The first time we boarded the inflatable boat, it exploded when they tried fixing it exploded again and so we had to wait 17 hours for another boat in the freezing cold and without any food or water³⁰. Once a new boat was brought, it was extremely overcrowded they told us we would be 20 passengers, but we ended up being 55. It took us 7 hours to get to Athens but once we got there people welcomed us, they gave us food and dry clothes and indicated to us the refugee camp that we were assigned. While I was there I was able to apply for a program called IOM³¹ that helps injured refugees and we were accepted in this program which helped a lot because they booked us a flight to the Netherlands where we plan to go and where I will get treatment for my hand.

²⁹ According to Lendaro (2016) Europe's neighbours, and especially Turkey, are under increasing pressure from Europe to tighten their border controls in order to minimize the flow of migrants heading for Europe. In the absence of legal opportunities to come to Europe or to transit through neighbouring countries.

³⁰ According to Dearden (2017) Poorly made dinghies are now being loaded with more than 150 people a time, creating the risk of sinkings, capsizings or the inflatable bursting under the strain, as well as deadly fuel spills.

³¹ Anon. 2016. "Regional Programs of Protection and Assistance to Vulnerable Migrants." *International Organization for Migration*. Retrieved November 24, 2019 (<https://www.iom.int/regional-programs-protection-and-assistance-vulnerable-migrants>).

2015: Abraham

I'm 21 years old and I was born in Nigeria, life in Nigeria is very hard there is a lot of poverty and living conditions are very bad. I used to live in Abuja but one of the various bombings during 2014 killed my mother and little sister while they were selling their products in the local market³². This attack, as many before, was orchestrated by the Islamist Boko Haram group³³, I only survived because my mother asked to go back to the house to cook dinner for us. After this event I was wrecked, all alone and with no guidance of what I should do or what was going to happen with my life; the only thing I knew was that I couldn't stay in Abuja, so I decided to join a friend who had an uncle in Libya. We traveled through the Saharan desert for about a month and a half in a pickup truck. Once we got to Tripoli, my friends and I were lost and in our trajectory of finding his uncle a group of soldiers picked us up; we were separated and I was transported to Bani Walid and were submitted to forced labor for 4 months³⁴. Escaping was impossible, I was only able to do it because the day that I was working in the outskirts fields a bunch of military trucks arrived at the field in which I was working on and this caught the attention of most of the soldiers that guarded the



³² According to *Ikemenjima* The desired states that youth work towards achieving are important determinants of the ways in which they plan and live their lives. In Eritrea, studies and project reports have shown that young people aim to attain the good life through quality education, vocational training and entrepreneurship (Müller, 2004; Riggan, 2016). However, their abilities to achieve these goals are often impeded by the lack of proper institutional arrangements to advance or enable the attainment of these aspirations and limited opportunities for employment. The lack of such institutional arrangements and structures constitute both a disincentive to their aspirations and a major impediment to their capacity to pursue a better life. As such, many youth are compelled to either align with the limited opportunities that exist or seek other opportunities abroad by emigrating.

³³ According to the Crisis Group (2017) The environment of mass poverty, social dislocations and associated intense religiosity that has spawned Boko Haram reflects the deep malaise and frustration with the Nigerian state. This environment has spawned various radical groups across a spectrum of diverse causes across the country.

³⁴ According to Hayden (2019) "The police and soldiers force migrants to do cleaning work and load weapons. They tell migrants that if you know how to shoot a gun we will make you stay with us."

fields and thus I was able to escape with a few other refugees. Eventually, I was able to get back to Tripoli and we had contacted a smuggler before our arrival to make sure that we had a set date to leave; I never saw my friend from Nigeria again. Eventually, we arrived in Sicily in Italy and were given a tent to live in a refugee camp until our documents were processed. Three months later my asylum application was rejected. I couldn't work or be there legally, but I couldn't keep living in such conditions, I had no money³⁵. One of the guys in my refugee camp told me there might be a few job openings for illegal immigrants. When I heard this I got really excited because that would mean I could save some money and go to Germany to finish my education or find a good job. I decided to go to the job interview without knowing what it was, and before I knew it, I had been captured by the Cosa Nostra (Sicilian Mafia)³⁶, I work for them now and I owe them a great amount of money that I will have to pay back by working here for the rest of my life; there is no escape these people are capable of anything.

³⁵ According to Giannopolus (2018) As the system has illegalised migrants and created invisible people who are caught up in the world of the informal economy, it then creates the opportunity for criminal networks to exploit that situation and thrive. The Mafia then get to profit from migrant labour by involving them in agriculture, drugs and prostitution... The worst situation is in agriculture, where migrants who live in shelters in squalid conditions are sent to work in the fields.

³⁶ According to Tondo (2016) Police documents reveal how “the mafia has forged links with some North African smugglers and arranged the delivery of boatloads of refugees from the Egyptian beaches of Gammase and Jamsa to Europe, offering shelter, food and transport to north Europe in exchange for vast sums of money which refugees paid out to Egyptian people smugglers.” The investigation started five years ago when a newly-arrived refugee told the Sicilian police how “he overheard one of the boatmen talking about a certain Greco and how he was organising immigration smuggling in Egypt.” Even after the initial arrests the gangs continued to extort money from the migrants. According to the police, in May 2011, an Egyptian suspect, Fathy Abdelkader, 51, kidnapped six child migrants from a camp near Siracusa, southeast Sicily. “The kidnappings were a message for the families of migrants who had failed to pay for services rendered by the Cosa Nostra,” said Parini. “We monitored phone calls made by Fathy to the families of kidnapped migrants who were made to listen to their children’s screams.

2017: Kiara

I grew up in Sokoto one of the poorest areas in Nigeria³⁷, my father died when I was 7 years old and my siblings and I had to stop going to school to work and make money for our family. My older brother took a job as a mechanic and a few of us sold water and bread in the streets. One day in my regular work schedule I was selling bread at the village market and a woman

approached me and told me that she used to be close to my father and that she knows that our family was going through a hard time and that they needed help³⁸. She told me that her sister lives in Europe and that she needs cooks, which was one of my specialties I was the one that cooked for my family. The women told me that a few other girls she knew were also going and that a friend of hers



will guide and protect us from Nigeria to Libya (Where we were supposed to get on a boat to get to Italy). We left Nigeria the following week in search of a better future³⁹. The women that we went with seemed to have really good connections because we were able to get through Libya pretty easily. We boarded a rubber boat and finally got to Italy. Once we got there the women told me that I had to start working immediately to repay the debt of the entire trip, which she told me was 40,000 euros. She gave me a bra and told me “This is your job. Go to the street at night and come back in the morning with money”. I had no choice⁴⁰.

³⁷ According to the IMF Sokoto state has been rated the poorest state in Nigeria with an 81.2 percent poverty rate. It has harsh climate conditions going as high as 45c on a good day, making it harder for irrigation projects. Yet despite this, it has about 80 percent of its population practising rural agriculture.

³⁸ Hughes et al (2005), opines that hundreds of Nigerian women and girls, hoping to escape poverty and discrimination at home, voluntarily migrate to Europe and America in response to job offers as domestic workers or waitresses. However, upon arrival in their country of destination, many of these women discover to their dismay that it is not the much-expected “Eldorado” of their dreams, as the majority of them found themselves trapped in forced prostitution, saddled with exorbitant debts and compelled to work under brutal conditions.

³⁹ According to Linus (2011) the major causes behind the trafficking of women are widespread poverty which sparks off the push-pull factors, a high level of illiteracy, unemployment and poor living standards as well as burdens of poverty of and desperation of poor and illiterate parents with large families who are ignorant of the impacts or nature of child trafficking.

⁴⁰ Beside poverty, many of the girls and women trafficked abroad are ignorant of the fate that await them in their country of destination. With little or no formal education some of the victims are easily carried away by the picture of Eldorado painted by their dubious sponsors.

The first night I found myself half-naked in the freezing cold standing next to an abandoned bridge in the province of Asti, Italy⁴¹. The first night I hid behind the bushes and cried, I just wanted to call my mom and go home. I wasn't angry I was filled with shame. Soon my supervisor caught me and I was beaten until I agreed to go back to work. For three months I was forced to have sex with up to six men a day. I did not know Italian but they only taught me to say 20 euros or 30 euros depending on what men asked me to do. I was exhausted every part of my body hurt and trembled every time I would get into a car with a different man. I was beaten, abused and hurt over and over again. Until one day, another Nigerian woman approached me in the street as soon as I started my shift; her words were "I know what you are doing because I've lived it too. She told me to get in her car and that everything will be okay; for some reason, I thought that things could not get worse than what they were and so I did not care and hopped in the car with her. It turns out it was the best thing I could have ever done, she turned out to be the founder of PIAM Onlus which is an Italian NGO working to rescue trafficked girls⁴². I was soon admitted to the hospital and slowly recovered with her help after; I have shelter, food and a lot of love from most of the people that have been through the same experiences that I have. I do not know what is going to happen with me or what I will do because I am frightened to go out to the streets again. I am afraid they will find me again, so I stay inside for most of the time wondering what I will do with my future.

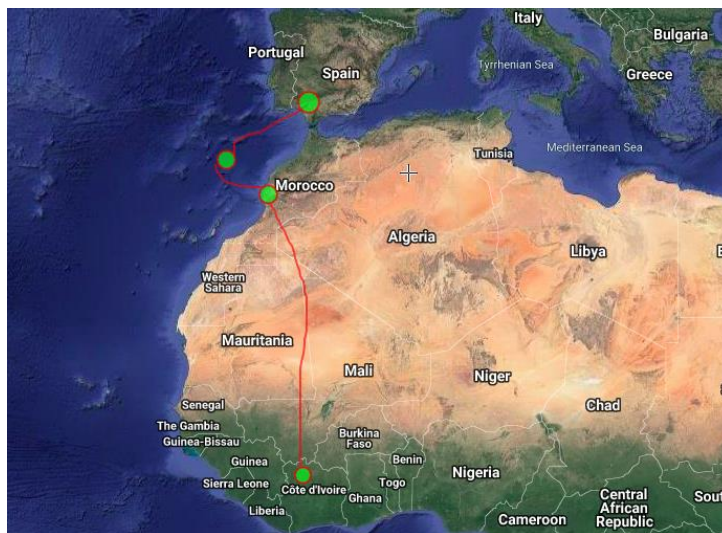
⁴¹ The Advocacy Project (N.D), reported that Nigerian women make up 70 per cent of 70,000 African victims of trafficking and that about 70 percent of these Nigerian women end up in Italy.

⁴² Piam and Progetto Integrazione Accoglienza Migranti. n.d. "PIAM Onlus." *PIAM Onlus*. Retrieved November 24, 2019 ([http://piamonlus.blogspot.com/search/label/rifugiati e profughi](http://piamonlus.blogspot.com/search/label/rifugiati%20e%20profughi)).

2010: Joseph

I was 18 when I finally realized I couldn't keep living in constant violence and instability. The political chaos and violence in Ivory Coast called for military intervention after massive protests against corrupt leaders⁴³. The military used force and guns to calm people; thousands died including my father and older brother. I was left with my mother and little sister. It was my duty to protect them and give them the future that they deserve. Thus we decided to leave for Europe to look for better opportunities. My little sister was 2 years old but the smugglers told us that it was too dangerous to bring a child that small to a journey like this one, but we couldn't leave her so we took her anyway. Thousands of people live in extreme poverty in Ivory Coast and I have heard from many that had left before that Spain is a great opportunity and that you make decent money because there are a lot of opportunities. After hearing this, how could we not leave? Along with 37 others, we flee Ivory Coast violence and smuggled my little sister in a suitcase.

Our journey consisted of traveling to the north of Africa through pick up trucks (Morocco) and then board a boat that would take us to the canary islands. The journey through land was exhausting but the smugglers who took us through it did not mind about my little sister so we did not have a problem with them; the problem was when we got to



Morocco the smugglers that were going to take us by boat were very serious about not letting us board because of my little sister. They took her away from us⁴⁴. We fought hard for her but there was nothing we could do as they threatened to kill her, and we were forced to board the rubber raft.

⁴³ Shahrokhi, Sholeh. 2016. "Life Jackets on Shore: Anthropology, Refugees and Europe ." *Anthropology Today* 3(2).

⁴⁴ According to Linus (2011) Still on the topic of sex trafficking, the U.S Department of State estimates that about 70 percent of all victims of international human trafficking are forced into the commercial sex industry, and half of all victims are children. With regard to labor trafficking, Forte said the practice is for the purpose of using humans for forced and indentured servitude such as maids, sweatshop factory hands, migrant agricultural workers or construction site laborers.

The journey through the sea was truly frightening. All of us (37) boarded a rubber raft that was for about 15 people. On the third day, the boat had leakages and water started getting inside the boat. Everyone was screaming, a few lost hope and jumped into the water and we never saw them again⁴⁵. A few hours later when our boat was basically a leaf floating in the sea and all of us were underwater the Maritime Rescue came. I had lost all hope and all I kept thinking was that I was the one who made the decision to leave I was the one that caused our family to separate and now I am going to end my mother's life too and I was so angry at myself. However, when they arrived I had hope at least I will save my mother at the cost of mine so I did everything to get her into the rescuer's boat although she had given up. But we made it. We were rescued and arrived to the Canary Islands the next day⁴⁶. Most of us did not make it, and it was only then when I realized the huge risk we had taken but my mother kept telling me that we couldn't stay in Ivory Coast that eventually we would have gotten killed and so it was better to die in the attempt of leaving for a better future. Here in the Canary Islands, we are currently living at a refugee camp in a container; we cannot work here and our documents are being processed for asylum. We have been here for about a month and we are planning to head to Cadiz in Spain as soon as we are granted asylum; we keep trying to find our little sister and my mother is attempting to go back to Morocco but we do not have any money to pay another smuggler to go back to Morocco.

⁴⁵ According to Nimführ (2019) 'The Aquarius rescued two boats while I was on board. The first had around 25 people, most of them from West Africa. The second was bigger, around 120 people, including many unaccompanied minors from Eritrea. The motor of the boat had stopped working, it was really crowded. I remember the eye contact with them. They were exhausted. It was the hottest hour of the day. The sun was direct on their heads and there was such a silence.'

⁴⁶ According to the IOM the following year saw 31,678 people, half of them Senegalese, making the crossing in pateras and cayucos, a type of fishing boat common in Senegal and Mauritania. A staggering 6,000 people died at sea in the attempt. "The cemeteries of the Canary Islands, especially in Fuerteventura, Lanzarote and Gran Canaria are full of tombs of nameless migrant castaways."

2017: Omar

I suppose I am one of those who almost made it. I guess that there are not a lot of stories like mine; I didn't die at sea or in the desert nor made it to Europe. I left home with the dream of getting to Europe because I was told I would easily find a job there and make some money, which would mean that I would be able to take care of my two siblings. My mother died when I was very young and our father basically abandoned and he never took care of us.

I had no choice but to leave Ghana and try to seek for a better future. I traveled for two months through west Africa and eventually made it to Libya. Here I paid 1000 euros to a man who promised to put me in a big boat to take me to Europe¹¹. He told me we would leave the

following week; and for the week that I was in Libya I had a terrible experience I was constantly treated very badly, by men who kept me in dirty houses with barely enough clean water and food that was nearly edible⁸. They were abusive and they seemed to enjoy treating me and a few other Africans very badly, they did not care that we had paid a large amount of money. Finally, the day



that we were supposed to leave arrived; and I was one of approximately 75 Africans who were shoved onto a small rubber boat in the early morning because it was still dark and we wanted to avoid being discovered by the Libyan coast guard¹⁵.

A few of us refused to get into the boat because it did not look strong enough to carry all of us to Europe, yet the men in charge had weapons and were very aggressive and did not care about our complaints of the boat so eventually a few stayed and most of us left. We did not make it to Europe. We spent five days aimlessly floating around basically lost at sea because the weight was too heavy to control the direction of the boat so we were just floating around. Eventually,

after a day of traveling the boat started losing air, I thought we were all going to die. We started out running out of food and water as well, because it was very scarce from the beginning and we eventually drifted towards the Tunisian coast we did not make it to the coast before the boat lost all of its air but we were rescued by the Tunisian coast guards and sent to a detention center in Tunisia. I was there for 2 months and was rescued because I caught a virus in my skin and they basically did not want me there; the condition in this place were inhumane, they kept us in a large room where we would all share one toilet (about 80 migrants) there was constant guard violence and not enough food or water for all of us⁴⁷.

I was sent to a hospital where the IOM⁴⁸ found me and gave a small grant of money that eventually got me back to Ghana where I decided to start a small business transporting yams to different markets. When I got back to Ghana my friends and relatives did not understand why I came back with nothing and when I was going to try to go back to Europe; however, I don't plan on going back. I was on the verge of death and I can't imagine leaving my siblings without parents and older brother. One thing is certain; if I had opportunities here in Ghana I would've never left to Europe. If young people like me had jobs and a way to earn a living we would not be losing thousands of lives these journeys.

⁴⁷ According McDonald-Gibson (2016) People are dying alongside the worms, mostly of tuberculosis. The warden limits the entry of assistance groups and the inmates don't receive a regular supply of medications. Over the past six months alone 22 people have died of starvation and sickness. Their water supply isn't regular either because the warden controls it, on one occasion turning it off for four days in a row. Prisoners were so desperate for water, they resorted to drinking toilet water.

⁴⁸ Anon. 2016. "Regional Programs of Protection and Assistance to Vulnerable Migrants." *International Organization for Migration*. Retrieved November 24, 2019 (<https://www.iom.int/regional-programs-protection-and-assistance-vulnerable-migrants>).

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Red Card: The European Refugee Crisis

Project Abstract

This research project aims to tackle the European Refugee and Migrant crisis, it is a very broad and extensive topic thus I will be focusing specifically on the violation of human rights regarding refugees and migrants as a consequence of globalization and development. The European refugee and migrant crisis is considered to be one of the greatest humanitarian crises in history. The European Union and its member states continue efforts to prevent the arrivals and outsource the responsibility of migration control to countries that are not part of the EU. Millions of people who live in unbearable situations in Syria, Afghanistan, Eritrea, and other countries desperately seek better opportunities and protection in more stable countries. In order to conduct research on such issues, I will utilize my working experience on a Center of integration and participation that helps immigrants this past summer in Madrid, Spain. It is from this experience that my interest in refugees and migrants sparked and from where the name of the project comes from. While in Spain, those who were granted asylum were given a document called “Tarjeta Roja” which means Red Card. Such document identifies thousands of people from different countries, races, religions and ethnicities as asylum seekers. Having this document is crucial since without it immigrants and refugees are denied rights to settle in any country that is not their own. Since this experience I had the desire to learn more about the topic and thus I saw this research project a perfect opportunity to continue my research. I conducted an extensive analysis of academic articles detailing the reasons for which people decide to migrate, their journey and the experiences that these people go through as migrants. The main goal of this research project is to fully understand migrant experiences. The research will seek to fully comprehend the violation of human rights that implies leaving one’s country in order to migrate to another and understand the reasons for such a morbid journey. In order to do so, I wrote 10 migrant fictional stories that are based on facts. Each story was written according to the character’s experiences and journey. The stories are based on extensive research tackling the situation of the country where the characters are coming from, their reason to migrate, the passage they took to get to Europe, their experience, and their arrival to the EU (if they arrive). Although these stories are written by me, I will utilize different but common scenarios, origins, passages, experiences that real migrants go through, and the stories will be a culmination of the research done in that particular area. The objective of this project is to communicate and demonstrate the deadly journey of various migrants in order to spark concern and willingness to help rather than to reject them. Immigration is inevitable in our era and we must learn to accept and embrace it without putting human beings through unbearable situations.